

Please support proposed bill HB 5860: An Act Recognizing Probate Court Employees as State Workers

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My name is Erin Jones. I am a probate court officer at the New London Regional Children's Probate Court. I am also a licensed marriage and family therapist. I am here to voice my support for HB 5860: An Act Recognizing Probate Court Employees as State Workers. I ask that you support this bill as well.

Probate Court Administration oversees the probate courts and determines employee wages, benefits and hours. Probate Court Administration staff are state workers; therefore, my supervisor is a state employee. This bill would allow the probate staff, the actual front-line staff of the system, to be recognized with the same level of respect.

During my employment of approximately 6 ½ years as a probate court officer, the Probate Court system has dramatically changed. It used to be a system of small probate courts in nearly every town. Employees were able to negotiate wages and other conditions of employment with their judge. At the time of the consolidation, employees' wages, benefits and conditions of employment began to be set by Probate Court Administration, a state agency. Even the probate court system policy manual is authored by Probate Court Administration. Therefore, the probate system is run by a state agency. My paycheck comes from the State of Connecticut; yet, I am not a state employee. Due to this, I do not receive the same rights and privileges as those I work for.

Since the consolidation of the probate system, the responsibilities of Probate Court employees have increased; however, wages certainly have not. According to the 2014 salary study paid for by Probate Court Administration, probate employees are paid significantly less than the state employees, who work in similar roles.

Probate workers do not have job security, we do not have a grievance system, nor do we have a professional human resources department. This creates fear among employees and, at times, hostile work environments. Such fear certainly increases at election time or when a judge reaches retirement age. This fear is because probate employees "serve at the pleasure of the judge." We can be fired at any time.

Experienced and talented probate employees look to leave the probate system due to the lack of job security, lack of comparable wages and a lack of respect.

Please take time to consider how the probate court system operates and the fact that the probate employees, non-state workers, are the people who make this state system successful. Please support this bill. Thank you for your time.